

## Influence of Student Councils' Communication Roles on Curbing Frequency of Student Unrests in Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub-County, Kenya

Leslie Kimame Simatwa<sup>1\*</sup>, Frederick B. J. A. Ngala<sup>2</sup>, Betty Tikoko<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Masters Student, School of Education, Kabarak University, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>School of Education, Kabarak University, Kenya

**\*Corresponding author**  
Leslie Kimame Simatwa

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya. The study was based on Social Systems Theory. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. There are only 3 Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools. Therefore, the census method was used to sample the three secondary schools. Stratified sampling technique was used to sample respondents from the categories of students and members of student councils. The target population for students was 750 while that of members of student councils was 78. The study used Likert type Students' Questionnaire and Questionnaire for Members of Student Councils as research instruments. Descriptive statistics namely, means, frequencies and percentages were computed. The study reported a negative and statistically significant relationship between communication roles by student councils and the frequency of student unrests ( $r = -0.848^{**}$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). It can be concluded that if student councils participate in communicating student problems to school management, frequency of student unrests will be curbed in Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub-county. The study recommends that student councils be thoroughly prepared in their roles through seminars, workshops and regular meetings with the principals.

**Keywords:** Student Councils, Student Unrests, roles played by student councils.

## INTRODUCTION

The government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Education, established Student Councils in Secondary Schools in 2009 to assist schools to manage student affairs. Yet, student unrests which are manifested in strikes, go-slows, rioting, burning of school property and violent behaviors still continue unabated. Student Councils are representative bodies for students and elected students to voice their grievances to school management authorities [1]. Student councils have the mandate to report, punish, communicate students complain to the management, represent the views of the students like lack of water, poor meals, poor light in school and teachers missing lessons [2].

In Singapore, student councils play a vital role in school management by performing functions such as giving direction, monitoring, supervising and communication. They lead and set the pace in schools. Student councils in Singapore act as ambassadors and role model through their conduct on a daily basis. During whole school events, they give speeches to make sure that rules and regulations are followed [3].

The Ministry of Education, United Nations Children Education Fund and the Secondary Schools Heads Association in the year 2008 formed the Kenya Secondary Schools Student Councils [4]. Its main aim was to find a long-lasting solution to unceasing student unrests in schools. Article 1 section 11 part (4) of the KSSSC constitution stipulated that students' councils should be committed to the constructive management of indiscipline by reducing student unrests [5].

In 2016, secondary schools in Kenya experienced many cases of student unrests which led to the burning of school dormitories, school buses, libraries and school administration buildings [6]. Many teachers and students were arrested. In the same year, more than 126 schools were involved in student unrests resulting in the destruction of properties worth millions of Kenya shillings [7]. Therefore, the researcher would like to establish the influence of the roles played by various student councils and frequency of student unrests.

This study seeks to address the problem of student unrests in public boys' secondary schools in

Elgon Sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya. It focuses attention on the efficacy of student councils in addressing the perennial problem of student unrests. If this problem is not solved, schools will continue to lose millions worth of property. Student unrests also invite wastage in the form of high dropout, repetition and low graduation rates. Could there be a relationship between roles played by student councils and frequency of student unrests in Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya. This study, therefore, sought to find out the influence of communication roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya with the  $H_{01}$  that "there is no statistically significant influence of Communication roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in Public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya."

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Role of Student Councils in Addressing Student Unrests

Student councils play an important role in school management, they play various roles like communicate student welfare to the management, coordinate co-curricular activities in the school, supervising preps in the morning and evening. They also check students' attendance in such activities as manual work and monitor indiscipline students in the school [8]. In Cameroon, there has been an increase in indiscipline problems such as stealing, truancy, sexual offense, vandalism and cheating in an exam as destructive practices [9]. The role of student councils was to report such vice to the school management. This has been successful as the student councils report such vices to curb student unrests in schools through decision making, communicating student's needs, disciplinary, guidance and counseling.

The student agreed that the student council body is a good tool to represent student's interest in the school management [10]. This is due to that fact that student councils are always at the grass route level to understand, discuss and know issues affecting students as they interact with students each passing day. This was credence by the research done by Kyalo, Konari & Njagi [11], who found out that schools, where student councils were not involved in representing student interest and implementing of school rules, were characterized by high levels of indiscipline leading to student unrests than those schools that involved students in representing their interest and implementing of school rules and regulations.

### Role of Student Councils in Africa

Student councils in South Africa are a body that represents every learner and which they participate in [12]. The main objective for its establishment was to create a sense of co-responsibility in learners. It

provides, an opportunity for learners to participate in decision making regarding the school management. It must liaise and communicate with learners, professional, management and the school. The student councils foster a spirit of mutual respect, good manners and morality amongst learners and most important it must promote and maintain discipline among learners in school.

In Ghana, student councils ensure and safeguard the general welfare of students by acting as the voice of students, airing their grievances in order to create a conducive academic environment [13]. This could curb the frequency of student unrests in schools. In Uganda research shows that seventy students in Brainstorm High school were expelled following unrests between the students and teachers overnight roll calls [14]. This was because teachers had stormed their hostels with canes, weeping them which lead to students defending themselves as they were resisting the roll call taken by teachers after it was reported by student councils of some students sneaking out of school. This implies that student councils were tasked to curb the frequency of student unrests in schools.

### Role of Student Councils in Kenya

Students' involvement in management is likely to lead to better decisions, to strengthen communication and to understand democracy leadership to better protect student's welfare and grievances. A study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Education in Kenya in 2006 revealed that student participation in the daily running of the school was directly linked to better academic performance and less school student unrests in schools [15]. It is out of these benefits and pressures that the government through the policy on devolution ought to involve students in the management of schools Education Act, 2013. Students are not just the beneficiaries of the school programmes, but they are co-interested parties in raising the quality of their academic programmes.

The Kenya Secondary School Student Council of 2009 empowered student councils to; represent views of students, promote good communication, contribute to the development of policies, link students with management and participate in decision making [5]. The representation role played by student councils involves airing grievances on matters affecting students. Although Student Councils have been embraced student unrest still continue. It is on this basis that the researcher sought to establish the influence of roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in public Boys Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon sub-county, Kenya.

### Communication Roles Played by Student Councils in Relation to Student Unrests

Communicating student grievances refers to the process where student councils gather and present

views of their fellow students to school management. Glover [2] noted that student councils hold forums with principals periodically to address issues affecting students in the respective schools. The forums are strictly for student council members and principals. They help in communicating student interest like poor meals, lack of entertainment in school, lack of pavement in schools, lack of water, poor coverage of syllabus and leaking roofs.

Effective principals have learned to use student councils as a vehicle to share their vision for school and expectation. Student councils effectively communicate principals' goals to students [2]. The essence of student councils is therefore to communicate with principals and students. Arekenya [16] noted that student councils play a good communication role in making sure that students' welfare is taken care of. For example, student councils ensure that students get permission to be out of class during lessons whenever they are sick or are engaged in other activities like cleaning of the school. No study has been conducted to establish the influence of communication roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in schools. According to NACADA [17], students in Nyeri High School attacked and killed members of the student council in 1999. This is because they suspected that student leaders would communicate to the principal the role they played in causing student unrests. KSSHA/UNICEF [18], reported that student councils help in projecting student voices and opinions to school

management which promote the general welfare of the students at the school level.

### Theoretical Framework

The research adopted the Social System Theory of Bertalanffy [19]. It is the interdisciplinary study of systems in general, with the objective of elucidating values that can be applied to all categories of systems at all points. Social system theory explains, predicts and describes organizational behavior in an institution which has different units interacting and inter-dependent in carrying out their roles to achieve a common course. Institutions like schools are organizations that have students, teachers and non-teaching staff who form sub-system and managed by supra-system like principal and Board of Management. All these sub-systems perform unique but complementary roles to attain common goals like transforming the input (students) into finished products with skills, knowledge and values. Kinyua [20], noted that sub-systems play unique and complementary roles to attain the goals of the same system. No single sub-system is superior or inferior to the other. The Principal occupies a higher rank while student councils occupy lower ranks but they all play a role in the system.

### RESULTS

#### Communication Roles Played by Student Councils

Analysis was conducted to determine students' perceptions of communication roles played by student councils in their schools. Table-1 presents the findings.

**Table-1: Descriptives for Communication Roles Played by Student Councils**

Statement	A	F	S	N	Mean	SD
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to bullying of students.	1.3%	18.6%	0.0%	80.2%	3.59	0.84
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to too many exams administered.	0.9%	0.0%	9.7%	89.3%	3.87	0.41
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to congestion in dormitories.	0.6%	0.0%	4.7%	94.7%	3.93	0.32
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to lateness in provision of meals.	6.3%	17.9%	37.4%	38.4%	3.08	0.90
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to nonattendance of lessons by teachers.	1.6%	0.0%	38.1%	60.4%	3.57	0.58
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to excess punishment meted by teachers.	0.0%	0.0%	30.2%	69.8%	3.70	0.46
Student council communicates to school management complaints related to lack of sanitation services.	0.9%	0.6%	78.3%	20.1%	3.18	0.46
Student councils communicate to school management complaints related to lack of water.	1.9%	56.0%	23.3%	18.9%	2.59	0.81
Student councils communicate to school management complaints related to poor quality of food.	2.2%	0.0%	17.9%	79.9%	3.75	0.56
Student councils communicate to school management complaints related to provision of textbooks.	1.6%	1.6%	0.0%	96.9%	3.92	0.45
Communication roles played by student councils overall Index					3.52	0.33
Valid N (listwise)	318					
Key: A=Always; F=Frequently; S=Sometimes; N=Never; SD=Standard Deviation						

Only an insignificant 18.6 % of respondents noted that student councils communicate frequently to school management complaints related to bullying of students. The majority, 80.2% maintained that student councils never communicate to school management complaints related to bullying of students. The mean of 3.59 shows that student councils never communicate students' complaints on bullying to the school administrations. The government of Kenya banned bullying in schools [21]. The finding shows that bullying could cause student unrests.

Respondents (89.3%) reported that student councils never communicate students' complaints related to the number of exams administered to various school management boards. Only 9.7% opined that student councils sometimes communicate to school management complaints related to number of exams administered. Respondents (94.7%) reported that student councils never communicate to the school management complaints related to congestion in school dormitories. The mean of 3.93 corroborates the reported percentages.

Findings imply that students are left out of the communication processes in the school. This could spark off student unrests. According to KSSHA/UNICEF [18], student councils help in projecting student voices and opinions to school management and that they promote the general welfare of the students at the school level. The KSSHA/UNICEF [18] report further points out that student councils interact more with students and know their needs best and that this helps the school to act fast in meeting the demands of students. Yet this is not the situation with schools under study.

Respondents (37.4%) opined that student councils sometimes communicate complaints related to lateness in provision of meals to school management , 38.4% of the respondents reported that student councils never communicate to school management complaints on the same issue. The mean of 3.08 shows that such complaints were sometimes communicated. Communicating student complaints on any matter should always be done to school management [22].

Up to 60.4% of respondents reported that student councils never communicate to school management complaints related to nonattendance of lessons by teachers. The mean of 3.57 shows that more respondents opined that the student councils rarely communicated non-attendance of lessons by teachers. Students get frustrated when teachers do not attend class. Nzioki [8] observes that the essence of student councils is to communicate with students and principals. This could cause unrests.

Table-1 further indicates that student councils sometimes communicated to the school management

complaints related to lack of sanitation services (78.3%). Respondents (20.1%) aver that student councils never communicate to the school management over complaints regarding lack of sanitation services. The mean of 3.18 confirms the same. Respondents (56.0%) also indicated that student councils frequently communicate to the school management over complains regarding lack of water in school. This was a good practice. However, 18.9% of respondents indicated that student councils never communicated to the school management over complains regarding lack water. The ideal practice is to communicate all student complaints. Nzioki [8] observes that the essence of student councils is to communicate with students and principals and that student councils create structures and mechanism to represent student views and that representing student welfare matters create a good working environment suitable for learning which may in turn reduce cases of student unrests in schools. If student councils do not communicate effectively, unrests are likely to be witnessed.

The findings clearly show that student councils never communicate to school management complaints regarding punishment meted by teachers in school (69.8%). Failure to communicate complaints about punishment could lead to student unrests in Elgon Sub-county. The findings clearly show that 79.9% of respondents felt that student councils never communicate to school management complaints regarding poor quality of meals in school. This could also cause unrests among students.

Table-1 shows that 96.9% of respondents reported that student councils never communicate to school management complaints regarding provision of textbooks in school. This is confirmed by the mean of 3.92 which shows no communication. Kyalo, Kinari and Njagi [11] in another study reported that majority of the respondents (83.6%) indicated that student councils were not involved in the communication of student's problems. Majority of the respondents (74.0%) felt that student councils did not communicate students' welfare problems to school management.

In general, the data presented on the role of student councils in communication had a mean of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 0.33. This implies that student councils only performed their communication role sometimes. This could lead to the high number incidences of student unrests in Elgon Sub-county. Communication roles are hampered by fear of intimidation from administrators, delays in effecting student suggestions, lack of avenues where students can effectively participate and that some administrators blame student councils for creating crises in schools [20].

### Differences in the Means of Communication Roles Played by Student Councils across School A, B and C

ANOVA test was conducted to investigate whether communication roles played by student councils across the three sampled schools differed significantly. Table-2 shows the findings.

**Table-2: Communication Roles Played By Student Councils**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.093	2	.047	.426	.654
Within Groups	34.560	315	.110		
Total	34.653	317			

According to Chemutai and Chumba [23], student councils should report issues such as quality of meals, poor facilities, unfair policies and rules, poor hygiene, lack of water and teachers missing lessons with a view to reducing student discontent. In the case of this study, many issues were largely not communicated by student councils. This could have prompted students to engage in unrests.

### Correlation between Communication Roles played by Student Councils and the Frequency of Student Unrests

Correlation Analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between communication roles played by student councils and the frequency of student unrests was analyzed. The findings are presented in Table-3.

**Table-3: Correlation between Communication Roles by Student Councils and the Frequency of Student Unrests**

		Frequency of Student Unrest
Communication Roles by Student Councils	Pearson Correlation	-.848**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	318

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table-3 shows that there exists a negative strong and statistically significant relationship between decision making roles played by student councils and the frequency of student unrest ( $r = -0.848^{**}$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that the higher the frequency of communicating student complaints to school management, the lower the frequency of student unrests. To that extent, school administration should put in place effective communication channels to link principals,

deputy principals, students, and teachers and support staff [24].

### Predictive Capacity of Communication Roles Played by Student Councils on the Frequency of Student Unrests

Table-4 shows how decision making roles were used to predict the frequency of student unrests. To do that a regression analysis was carried out.

**Table-4: Influence of Communication Roles on the Frequency of Student Unrests**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	7.218	.182		39.678	.000
Communication roles played by student councils	-.871	.091	-.505	-9.564	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Frequency of Student Unrest

Table-4 shows that communication roles played by student councils accounts for up to 87.1% negative variation on the frequency of student unrests. This implies that communication roles played by student council could curb the frequency of student unrests. If student councils do not play there communication roles effectively, students could resort to unrests to vent their frustration and anger in the

school. Kiprop [25] also found out that limited communication among students and the management is the main cause of indiscipline case. Therefore, student councils should be effective in communicating students' problems to school authorities to prevent unrests.



### Testing the Hypothesis of no Statistically Significant Influence of Communication Roles Played by Student Councils on Curbing the Frequency of Student Unrest

Table-4 shows that Decision making roles had beta coefficient of corresponding p-value less than 0.05 alpha. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and a conclusion made that decision making roles played by student councils have a significantly influenced on curbing the frequency of student unrest in public boys boarding secondary schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya ( $p=0.000$ ). This concurs with Mukiti [26], avers

that student councils have always been involved in educational administration due to the fact that student councils are close to their colleagues in school, they give directions to students, they set the pace for other students in order to attain the set objectives, and that they also motivate and inspire other students to ensure good performance in all school activities.

### Regression analysis

The purpose of regression analysis was to predict the dependent variable using the independent variable.

**Table-5: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	1.873 <sup>a</sup>	.762	.759	.27943
Predictor: (Constant), communication roles played by student councils.				

Table-5 shows that the Adjusted R square value is 0.759. This implies that up to 75.9% variation in frequency of student unrests is due to the variation in the independent variables of the study. The independent variable comprises decision making roles, communication roles, disciplinary roles and guidance and counseling roles played by student councils with a standard error of the estimate of 0.27943. It implies that 75.9 of frequency of student unrests can be explained by the decision making roles, communication roles, disciplining roles and guidance and counseling roles played by student councils.

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Communication Roles Played by Student Councils

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of communication roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in public boys boarding secondary schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya. Student councils did not execute their communication effectively. They never reported the following issues: bullying (80.2% confirmed); number of exams (89.3% confirmed); congestion in dormitories (94.7% confirmed); excess punishment meted by teachers (69.8% confirmed); provision of textbooks (96.9% confirmed); and quality of meals (79.9% confirmed).

Communication roles had a beta coefficient corresponding p-value less than 0.05 alpha leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. A conclusion was made that Communication roles played by student councils have a significant influence on curbing the frequency of student unrests in public boys boarding secondary schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya ( $p=0.000$ ). These findings show that the study was statistically significant. It implies that were student councils to communicate issues effectively to school administrations, the frequency of student unrests would go down in public boarding secondary schools in Elgon

Sub-county. The communication roles played by student councils help to ease tension in schools.

### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be observed that all public boarding secondary schools in Elgon Sub-county experienced numerous indiscipline problems, such as the burning of school property, public demonstration, boycott attending lessons, boycott eating meals, refuse to do manual duties and boycott joint exams as forms of student unrests. Concerning the communication objective, it can be concluded that as student councils did not communicate to school management students' complaints related to the provision of textbooks, congestions in dormitories, too many exams administered and bullying of students. This could have caused the many student unrests.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher assessed the influence of roles played by student councils on curbing the frequency of student unrests in public boys boarding secondary schools in Elgon Sub-county, Kenya. The following recommendations were made;

- Student councils should be allowed to communicate students' grievances. Suggestions made by student councils on students' grievances should be given a lot of weight and importance.
- The schools under study should carry out continuous benchmarking with schools of excellence who have managed to handle the problem of students' unrests. This will enable them to adopt new and better ways of handling the problem of student unrests.

### Policy Recommendations

It herein recommended that:

- The functions of Student councils should be operationalized through formulation of policies which must then be implemented.

- New policies on election of student councils must be implemented by schools principals.
- Students must be given more powers to assist teachers in supervising other students and more so, the ones who have high tendencies to flout school rules.
- Through proper policy formulation capacity building and sensitization of both teachers and students should be undertaken by stakeholders so that students and teachers could support student leadership.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The study recommends the following areas for further studies:

- Influence of other roles of student councils (which did not form part of this study) on frequency of student unrests.
- Other factors which influence student unrests.
- The effects of student unrests on achievement of goals of secondary education.

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